



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 So. 19th
Bozeman, MT 59718

February 24, 1999

TO: Governor's Office, Julie Lapeyre, Room 204, State Capitol, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620
Dept. Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Director's Office
Fisheries Division
Lands Section
Legal Unit
FWP Commissioner
Dennis Flath
State Bulletin Board
MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, POB 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., POB 201800, Helena, MT 59620
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, POB 1184, Helena, MT 59624
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, POB 595, Helena, MT 59624
George Ochenski, POB 689, Helena, MT 59624
Gallatin County Commissioners, Gallatin County Courthouse, 311 W. Main, Bozeman, MT 59715
MT Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Madison County Commission, Box 278, Virginia City, MT 59755
Rep. Bob Raney, 212 S. 6th St., Livingston, MT 59047-3023
Rep. Karl Ohs, Box 212, Harrison, MT 59735
Sen. Chuck Swysgood, 506 S. Atlantic, Dillon, MT 59725
Skyline Sportsmen, Box 173, Butte, MT 59703
Beaverhead Outdoors Association, POB 1401, Dillon, MT 59725
Anaconda Sportsman's Club, #2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711
Jefferson Valley Sportsman's Association, POB 663, Whitehall, MT 59759
Prickly Pear Sportsman's Association, 1721 Virginia Dale St., Helena, MT 59601
Steve Felix, 645 Bulltail Road, Belgrade, MT 59714
Linda Ulmer, USFS Region One, Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807
Rick Stowell, USFS Region One, Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807
Montana Chapter AFS, Mark Lere
Public Lands Access Association, William Fairhurst, Box 247, Three Forks, MT 59752-0247
N. Clark Wheeler, POB 1053, Bozeman, MT 59715
State Land Coalition, Jack Atcheson, 3210 Ottawa St., Butte, MT 59701
Ruby Valley Conservation District, 209 So. Main, Sheridan, MT 59749
Madison Conservation District, POB 353, Ennis, MT 59729
Lewis & Clark Chapter of Trout Unlimited, POB 516, Twin Bridges, MT 59754
Madison-Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited, POB 52, Bozeman, MT 59771
Ennis National Fish Hatchery, 180 Fish Hatchery Road, Ennis, MT 59729
Bureau of Land Management, 1005 Selway Dr., Dillon, MT 59725
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 100 N. Park, Suite 320, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Natural Resources, Jim Kalitowski, 151 Evergreen, Suite C, Bozeman, MT 59715
Department of Natural Resources, Stan Vlahovich, 730 N. Montana St., Dillon, MT 59725

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You recently received a draft environmental assessment (EA) of a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to acquire 40 acres of property surrounding Upper Twin Lake in the Axolotl Lake Basin and an access easement. This proposal, in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed acquisition of

Madison

400 acres, will ensure access to FWP's fluvial Arctic grayling brood stock, ensure public access to Axolotl Lakes for recreation, and preserve the ecological integrity of the area.

I find there to be no significant impacts associated with this action and conclude an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. The completed EA is an appropriate level of analysis. The draft documents you received were not changed after a public review period. Please consider your previous copies as the final version.

A limited number of comments were received regarding the acquisition. These comments are summarized in the enclosed Decision Notice. The comments indicate strong public support for this acquisition. It is my recommendation to purchase the 40 acres of property surrounding Upper Twin Lake and the access easement subject to approval by the FWP Commission. The FWP Commission will be asked to approve the purchase of this property at their business segment of the Commission meeting scheduled for March 10, 1999.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen L. Lewis".

Stephen L. Lewis
Regional Supervisor

DECISION NOTICE

AXOLOTL LAKES LAND ACQUISITION

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

February 24, 1999

PROPOSAL:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire 40 acres of property surrounding Upper Twin Lake (a.k.a. Cutthroat Lake) in the Axolotl Lake Basin and an access easement. This proposal, in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed acquisition of 400 acres, will ensure access to FWP's fluvial Arctic grayling brood stock, ensure public access to Axolotl Lakes for recreation, and preserve the ecological integrity of the area.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS:

An Environmental Assessment was prepared and made available to the public on January 15, 1999. Public notices of the proposed action were run in area newspapers and a public meeting was held in Ennis, MT on Thursday January 21, 1999 where oral comments were also accepted. Public comments were accepted through February 16, 1999.

Written Comments:

FWP received five written comments, all expressing support for the proposed acquisition. Of these comments four were received from individuals representing organizations: Montana Wildlife Federation, Madison County Commissioners, Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, and the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club. The other voice of support was an individual.

A letter was also received from the Montana Historical Society, which stated that the acquisition is not likely to harm cultural resources in the area.

A letter, a request for information, and a verbal comment by phone were critical of the appraisal, stating the value established was too high.

In response: Two appraisals have been completed by an independent appraiser. The appraised value referenced in the EA is from the second appraisal and is for the whole 440 acres. This value was mentioned and a brief summary of the whole project was provided for information purposes only. FWP wanted the public to know that FWP's acquisition was part of a larger project and contingent on the whole project being approved and funded. This EA only dealt with FWP's acquisition. The BLM will draft a separate EA and allow for public input at that time. FWP proposes to pay \$150,000 for the 40 acres and the administrative access as part of the whole project. This amount is believed to be a reasonable price for this type of property and access to it. When acquiring property, FWP must consider how critical the property is for the purposes for which it is to be acquired. FWP must then decide what price would be reasonable without inflating land values and yet providing an acceptable price to pay the landowner.

Oral Comments:

Twelve individuals attended the public meeting and three voiced comments.

One individual was a Madison County Commissioner who reiterated the written support for the acquisition. He also inquired as to whether the acquisition would affect the tax base.

In response: FWP will make payments in lieu of taxes on the acquired property that will meet or exceed those paid by the current landowner.

Two individuals commented primarily on fisheries management in the greater lake complex. They requested that the other lakes should be managed for a diversity of fishing opportunity with respect to species available. One also stated that Axolotls are common throughout the greater area and stocking in the major lakes is unlikely to harm them. Both also commented that any commercial outfitting should be limited in the greater area, but equitably distributed among many outfitters.

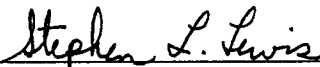
In response: Fisheries management efforts will be increased in the immediate future. Sampling and stocking will begin on a regular basis in 1999. Currently a self-sustaining rainbow trout population exists in one of the lakes, the grayling brood inhabits another, and a third is scheduled for stocking with westslope cutthroat trout in 1999. Outfitting in the area would be regulated primarily by the BLM by agreement with FWP. The cooperative management plan will be established after the larger acquisition is completed.

DECISION:

Utilizing the EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed acquisition.

After careful review of the proposal and corresponding comment, it is my recommendation to purchase the 40 acres surrounding Upper Twin Lakes and the access easement subject to approval by the FWP Commission at their business segment of the Commission meeting scheduled for March 10, 1999. This action will benefit conservation of fluvial Arctic grayling and the general public.

I find there to be no significant impacts associated with this action and conclude that an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary. The draft EA is an appropriate level of analysis and will become the final EA.



Stephen L. Lewis
Regional Supervisor
Bozeman, MT
February 24, 1999